

The Concept of State Identity in International Relations: A Theoretical Analysis

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Abstract

The identity problematique is fast moving to the core of the research agenda of international relations discipline, and the concept of state identity has now become a permanent feature of the constructivist discourse. This paper identifies four problems attendant upon the introduction of the state identity concept to international relations theory. Firstly, the relationship between state identity and other important concepts of constructivist argument is underspecified. Secondly, the question of how states choose among multiple identities is not sufficiently addressed by constructivists. Thirdly, the concept of state identity has been rather slow to find its way into empirical research and is still largely ignored by the rationalist scholars. Finally, the link between state identities and power tends to be neglected by both constructivist scholars and their rationalist rivals. In addressing these problems, the paper clarifies the relationship between state identity, culture and norms and provides a systematic review of the state identity approaches. The paper proposes a new definition of the concept that is compatible with the rationalist foundations of the mainstream of international relations discipline. It illuminates the role of state identity as a tool in the strategic interaction among states, and provides several examples to illustrate the close relationship between state identities and power. Since power is the key explanatory concept for many rationalist approaches, the paper argues that the concept of state identity also deserves to be an important part of rationalist analytical frameworks.

1. Introduction

Constructivism, in particular state identity approaches represented by Alexander Wendt (1999) and Peter Katzenstein (1996a), has become a part of the almost exclusively rationalist mainstream of international relations theory¹. These constructivist approaches, generally considered as the most serious challenge to rationalist dominance, claim that the theoretical framework based on the concept of state identity can offer a viable alternative to rational choice theory. While state identity is only one of the many non-material factors (like culture, norms, beliefs, ideas etc) studied by the constructivist scholars, it provides very important causal links to support the basic arguments of constructivist theoretical frame-

work. The concept of identity makes it possible to integrate changes to the actors' interests into the research framework. According to the constructivist reasoning, the interests of states are shaped by their identities, while state identities (and therefore interests) themselves are subject to change in the process of interaction. Constructivists therefore claim that their approaches can provide better theoretical accounts of evolution and change in international relations than their rationalist rivals. Constructivists also advance the argument that states observe norms not only because (and when) it is in their self-interest, but also through internalizing them in their identities, thus broadening the narrow liberalist framework for the study of norms.

Given the importance of state identity for constructivist theory, it is somewhat surprising that many constructivists fail to provide an explicit definition of the concept. There is still no agreement on how to integrate state identity into constructivist analytical frameworks, while the number of empirical studies that rely on the concept is quite limited². Probably a related problem is that few if any scholars in the rationalist mainstream have shown interest in their rivals' central concept of state identity. This indifference to identity contrasts starkly with the elaborate constructivist critique of the key rationalist and realist concepts like national interest or international anarchy. There are probably a number of reasons why the concept of identity has not received the attention it surely deserves. Some rationalist scholars might think that methodological rationalism and the idea of multiple and variable state identities are rival and mutually exclusive theoretical commitments. Yet others might believe that rationalism and constructivism differ significantly in their research agenda and theoretical concerns, and so regard identity as irrelevant to their field of study.

Against such a background, this paper intends to provide a systematic review of the multiple ways the state identity is conceptualized in international relations discipline³. The paper argues that rationalist views of state identity are essentially misconceptions, often born from the general sense of rivalry toward the ontologically (and methodologically) "foreign" constructivist approaches. By focusing on the neglected link between state identity and power, the paper seeks to demonstrate the theoretical relevance of the concept of state identity to the international relations discipline in general and its rationalist mainstream in particular.

2. Culture, norms or identity?

State identity is only one among several concepts widely used by constructivist approaches, such as culture, norms or ideas. Why, then, should this paper choose the concept of state identity as its primary target? To answer this question, we need to clarify the relationship between state identity, and culture and norms, respectively⁴. This is, however, not an easy task. On the one hand, constructivist understandings of culture and state identity are not uniform. On the other, it seems that some constructivist scholars use the concepts of culture, norms and identity almost interchangeably, without much thought given to whether these concepts should be distinguished at all or how these concepts relate to each other. The resulting ambiguity makes it practically impossible to uncover exact relationship among the concepts, yet some general patterns are readily discernable.

State identity is generally seen as a part of culture, which most constructivists define as socially shared beliefs. This definition of culture is quite different from and narrower than the conventional or commonsense meanings of the word. This difference should not come as a surprise since constructivists are concerned with only that part of culture, which is directly related to international relations. Thus, for

example, Thomas U. Berger's approach (1998) specifically refers to a state's domestic political-military culture, defined as a "subset of the larger historical-political culture that encompasses orientations related to defense, security, the military as an institution, and the use of force in international affairs" (Berger, 1998, 15). There is, however, a disagreement on whether state identity is part of the domestic or international culture. While most constructivist scholars emphasize state's domestic culture as a source of state identity, Alexander Wendt (1992; 1994; 1999) sees culture of interstate community as a primary determinant of state identity. In his *Social Theory of International Politics*, Wendt (1999) conceptualizes international relations in terms of three ideal types of interstate-level social structures. These are Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian "cultures of anarchy." The term "culture" refers to the "socially shared knowledge," "knowledge" in turn defined as "any belief an actor takes to be true" (Wendt, 1999, 140-1). Since Wendt assumes states to be unitary actors, the beliefs that comprise cultures of anarchy are shared among states, not among individuals.

Wendt's cultures of anarchy are important because of their mutually constitutive relations with state identities. The key attribute of each culture is "*role*", or "distinct posture or orientation of the Self toward the Other with respect to the use of violence" (Wendt, 1999, 258). Wendt's constructivism sees states' own identities and interests as secondary products of those system-level roles. In Hobbesian culture of anarchy the posture is that of *enemies*, "threatening adversaries who observe no limits in their violence towards each other" (Wendt, 1999, 258). In Lockean culture the orientation is that of *rivals*, "competitors who will use violence to advance their interests but refrain from killing each other" (Wendt, 1999, 258). Finally, in Kantian culture of anarchy states share the role of *friends*, "allies who do not use violence to settle their disputes and work as a team against security threats" (Wendt, 1999, 258). It is easy to recognize the "state of nature" behind Hobbesian culture and the Westphalian system of sovereign states behind Lockean culture. The states that populate different anarchic systems (with their distinct cultures of anarchy) are under pressure to internalize the dominant "role relationships" of those systems, namely enmity, rivalry and friendship, in their own identities and interests (Wendt, 1999, 259). While the very concept of *state* identity seems to imply unproblematic and unchanging border between the self and other states, Wendt's approach suggests that the boundaries of the self might expand to include other states (Wendt, 1999, 229). Wendt argues that this is exactly what happens in Kantian culture, when states develop collective identity as "friends" and start to identify with each other's welfare and security. Such state identities as "liberal democracy" or "European Union member" illustrate the possibility of shifting identity borders in a more familiar setting.

Wendt's approach is interested primarily in system-level roles or collective representations about Self and Other among states conceptualized as unitary actors. States' own identities become vessels for the "roles" that properly belong to interstate culture. But what is the difference between the cultures of anarchy and the state identities they are supposed to constitute? After examining causal claims of Wendt's argument, Hidemi Suganami (2002) concludes that a culture of anarchy is no more than a system-level description of a situation when states share a particular role as their identity. Wendt's cultures of anarchy do not constitute the state identity of a particular state; they are just names for the commonly shared part of the state identities of a group of states.

3. State identity and norms

Constructivists argue that states follow norms not just because and when it is in their interest, but also

when they have internalized those norms in their identities. To this end, Wendt specifies three possible degrees of internalization of cultural norms. The first degree of internalization occurs when a state, in neorealist fashion, is constrained or *forced* to observe cultural norms. The norms in question might be quite negative, like “kill or be killed” norm of Hobbesian anarchy. The neoliberal explanation that a state observes norms because it is in its self-interest corresponds to the second degree of internalization in Wendt’s typology. Finally, the third degree of internalization occurs when, in accordance to “constructivist hypothesis,” a state observes the cultural norms that it perceives as legitimate (Wendt 1999, 250). To perceive a norm as legitimate basically means fully accepting that norm’s claims on oneself through appropriating of a corresponding identity (Wendt 1999, 272-3). Whether states see norms as legitimate ultimately depends on their identities.

A similar argument is advanced by Peter Katzenstein (1996a, 27), who distinguishes between “thin” regulatory norms of liberal approaches and “thick” constitutive norms that define actors’ identities and shape their interests. In his analysis of Japan’s identity, Katzenstein asserts that the links between Japan and the United States belong to “the realm of regulatory norms, of standards of appropriate behavior within a diplomatic relationship defined in terms of long-term interests,” and so “do not touch on issues of collective identity” (Katzenstein, 1996a, 150). Such thin regulatory norms correspond to the second degree of internalization in Wendt’s argument. The third degree of internalization is represented by what Katzenstein believes to be the core element of Japanese collective identity, namely the constitutive norm of Japan as a “nonmajoritarian polity that respects intensely held views of strong minorities” (Katzenstein, 1996a, 19). Another norm that is central to Japan’s identity is a norm of Japan as a trading state that pursues economic prosperity (Katzenstein, 1996a, 19).

Probably all constructivists agree that state identity concept makes it possible to go beyond the narrow utilitarian view of norms as advanced by rationalists. A particular action prohibited by a norm becomes conceived as incompatible with the image of the Self. This could involve emergence of a new state identity, but often a slight modification of the existing identity is enough. For example, the norm that forbids the first use of weapons of mass destruction usually does not call for a new state identity, as it could be easily incorporated through the expansion of a state’s pre-existing identity as a “civilized” nation⁵. Norms are therefore an integral part of state identity within constructivist paradigm. Without the concept of state identity, constructivist accounts of norms would be hardly different from what has been already offered by neoliberal scholars. Therefore Katzenstein (1996b, 5) makes an explicit reference to identity when he defines norms as “collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors within a given identity,” a definition which was also adopted by Shannon (2000, 294). Since state identity is both a core component of culture and a depository of norms, it is a crucially important concept that enables and holds together much of the constructivist argument.

4. State identity and national identity

The distinction between state identity and national identity is not an easy one to make. Some scholars use the term “national identity” in respect to what is obviously state identity (Berger, 1996, 338), others divide identity into internal and external dimensions (Banchoff, 1999, 268). National and state identities often, if not always, overlap to a certain degree. The shared narratives of national identity that bind the “imagined community” together do also relate this community to other nations, while state identity understood as shared beliefs about the Self and the Other can play an important role in sustaining “we-

ness” of national community. The distinction between national and state identities, therefore, does not simply and naturally follow from fundamental differences between those concepts. To a certain degree this distinction results from the different theoretical concerns and research priorities across the disciplinary fields of political science and international relations. Those scholars concerned with domestic politics, nationalism or ethnic conflict see identity as “national,” while scholars of foreign policy and international relations discipline emphasize the external dimension of identity.

Recognizing the ongoing need for nation-building in both developing and developed countries, William Bloom (1990) argues that the resulting “national identity dynamic” often influences foreign policy, thus spilling over to the domain of international relations. The potential importance of national identity problematique for international relations theory is also a major implication of Ruggie’s (1997) argument about “congruence between the vision of the world order invoked by American leaders when ‘founding’ a new international order has been at stake, and the principles of domestic order at play in America’s understanding of its own founding, in its own sense of political community” (Ruggie, 1997, 93). America’s *national* identity factors “contributed to the very definition of U.S. interests” on such occasions as creating the United Nations and NATO (Ruggie, 1997, 24), and in combination with US superior capabilities, made a major impact on the international system. In other words, national identity of a hegemonic (or great) power can be an important variable in international relations theory proper.

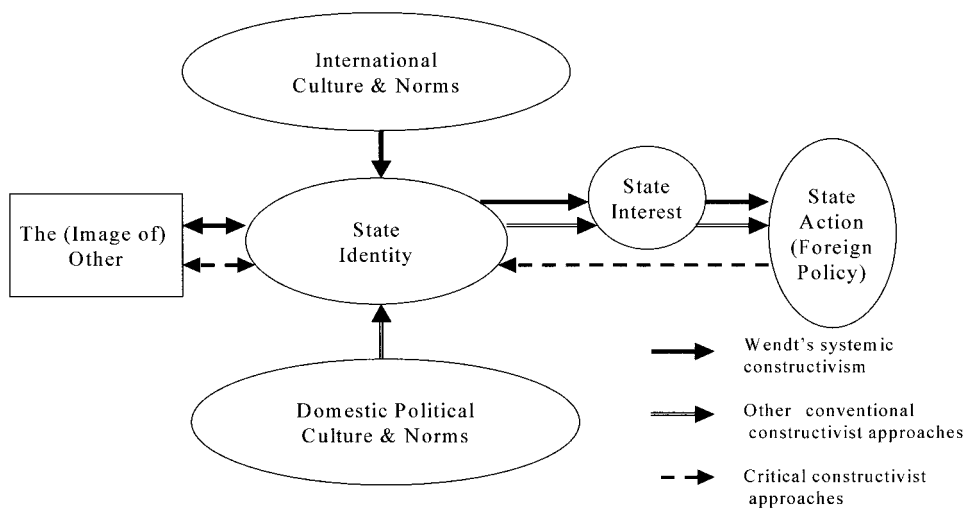
More than the “content” of state identity, critical constructivists⁶ emphasize the boundaries that are created by identity discourse. They argue that identity exists only in discourse; it is never stable or secure so as to become an explanatory variable in foreign policy analysis. Critical constructivists usually view the Self-Other relations in terms of opposition, whereby various negative traits are attributed to the Other and positive ones to the Self. The Other in this view could even be the Self of the past, as in the case of the post-war West Germany defining its identity largely in opposition to Nazi Germany (Zehfuss, 2002). David Campbell (1992) presents probably the most elaborate critical constructivist approach to state identity, taking Bloom’s argument that foreign policy might serve as a tool for nation-building to its extreme. Campbell’s analysis of US identity and foreign policy rejects the conventional understanding of foreign policy as the “external orientation of pre-established states with secure identities” (1992, 75) and reverses the causal link between state identity and foreign policy. Campbell aims to retheorize foreign policy as “one of the boundary-producing practices central to the production and reproduction of the identity in whose name it operates” (1992, 75). He understands state identity as the “outcome of exclusionary practices in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the ‘inside’ are linked through a discourse of ‘danger’ with threats identified and located on the ‘outside’” (Campbell, 1992, 75). The “discourse of danger” consists of various threats that are invented or inflated by ruling elite in order to represent and therefore produce “us” in distinction from dangerous “them.” Since nation-building process is never completed, state’s identity and even state’s existence *per se* cannot be secure and must be sustained by the “discourse of danger.”

The weakness of Campbell’s arguments is that they usually cannot be empirically validated. There is simply no way to determine to what extent state’s existence is dependent on foreign policy as the “discourse of danger.” Once we make an analytical distinction between the state and its government, we can see that the foreign policies based on the image of “dangerous” Other do not necessarily aim at nation-building. The aim of such policies is often to secure government’s grip on power. It is quite safe to assume that states have multiple claims to legitimacy, and don’t have to rely for their existence on such an insecure foundation as “discourse of danger.” While some governments do indeed shield themselves

from accountability for misdeeds by the use of “discourse of danger,” yet the very idea of public accountability has been more successfully realized in (democratic) states than in most other collective actors, including international organizations and NGOs. States also provide people with the essentially important services such as welfare, education or internal security, and it is far from clear if any other actors could successfully replace states in those areas. Moreover, states have in their disposal so many nation-building “tools” that the ongoing nation-building could probably proceed without “discourse of danger”-type foreign policy.

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the major directions of research in state identity that have been discussed so far. The Figure shows that no single approach covers all of the theoretically significant causal links, which are indicated by arrows.

Figure 1. The major directions of research in state identity in international relations theory



5. The content of state identity

Thanks to its controversial assumption of state as a unitary actor, Wendt's approach boasts of a simple definition of identity as state's self-understanding and a seemingly parsimonious view of state's interest and action. In this view, identity shapes state's interests, which in turn guide state behavior. In order to account for state behavior, we need to “identify” the identity responsible for the interests that guide state actions. However, such an approach basically invites a tautological line of argument. Since Wendt defines state identity only in terms of its external aspect, we have to deduce identity by observing state actions on international arena. However, when state identity is ultimately deduced from its behavior, there is no reliable way to determine whether changes in behavior result from identity change or other factors. State identity risks becoming a redundant label for some relatively stable pattern of a particular state's behavior, while any change to this pattern is easily confused with identity change.

A related problem of many state identity approaches is that they fail to provide satisfactory explana-

tions of how actors choose from among competing identities. While some constructivists do not even acknowledge this problem, Wendt does note that “many situations call up several identities that may point in different directions” (1999, 230). Wendt himself probably recognizes the resulting degree of indeterminacy inherent in constructivist analytical framework. Admitting that “there is no way to predict a priori how internal identity conflicts be resolved,” he offers a general hypothesis that such conflicts are resolved according to “salience” or hierarchy of identities (Wendt, 1999, 230). Ironically enough, Wendt has to qualify his hypothesis as “clearly a very crude generalization that is often violated” (1999, 231). Wendt assumes that all interests come from identities (1999, 231). Yet especially in the situations of identity change, when old identities are abandoned and new ones are chosen and embraced, we have to assume certain values to become the basis for such choice. Identities thus exist in parallel with values or interests: neither is ontologically prior to one another. Interests are produced by identities, but then identities are chosen because of certain interests or values.

6. A reconceptualization of state identity

This paper proposes a definition of *state identity* as a set of broadly accepted (often symbolic or metaphorical) representations of state, in particular in its relation to other states, together with the corresponding beliefs about the appropriate behavior, rights or responsibilities. State identity has two dimensions. The *internal dimension* of state identity refers to the representations and the corresponding beliefs held by the elites and general public within the state itself, while the representations of and beliefs about that state among the elites and public in other states belong to the *external dimension* of state identity.

In itself, state identity cannot act as a causal determinant of state interest and policies. It always requires interpretation and linkage to particular actions. It is only through the broadly understood process of *state identity politics* that the state identity can shape the articulation of interests and actual policies. State identity politics would refer to various attempts by state representatives and other political actors to reinforce, weaken, or redefine the currently held representations of state and the beliefs about the appropriate behavior, in order to influence the state’s foreign policy (to get support for or build opposition to a particular policy or set of policies) or its relations with other states. In a narrow sense, state identity politics refers to the more or less explicit attempts to influence state identity. Yet in a broader sense, the conduct of policies that have been linked to the particular representations of state ends up, depending on the consequences of those policies, either reinforcing or weakening those representations. Thus even the simple *linkage* of a particular policy with the state identity, that is, presenting that policy as an expression of (or at least compatible with) the accepted state representations and the corresponding beliefs about the appropriate behavior, should be also considered a part of state identity politics.

This paper argues for a broad definition of state identity, which would include both internal (domestic) and external (international) dimensions. Surely, the ways the state is represented in the domestic political debate, on the one hand, and within or by other states, on the other, could often be quite different. Generally speaking, domestic representations are in their majority positive, while the international representations usually include both positive and negative ones. While the self-representation as the “leader of the West” might dominate the political debate within US, the prevalent representations of US in and among some other states would also include that of “imperialist power.” This paper argues against privileging either internal or external dimension of identity, evident in the constructivist

approaches of Katzenstein, Berger and Wendt. It also does not support a more rigid distinction between these dimensions. The global spread of the mass communications, including the Internet, along with the proliferation of various transnational exchanges and NGO activities, makes it progressively more difficult to isolate domestic dimension of state identity from outside influences.

Participants in state identity politics, whether internal or external, come from both inside and outside the state. Domestic political actors are aware of and can attempt to influence the external identity, while the outside actors are similarly aware of and can participate in the internal identity politics. Quite often it can be difficult to disentangle the influence attempts directed at the external identity from those that target the internal one. For example, Japan's external identity still includes the representation as a (potentially) "militarist power," a representation that is consciously maintained and reinforced by local elites in many Asian countries. Through the customary protests against any Japanese move that can be represented in terms of "militarist revival," Chinese or South Korean governments can participate in Japan's identity politics. Among the basic aims of such actions by Asian governments is to counter the expansion of Japan's influence abroad. Moreover, many Japanese policymakers are keenly aware that certain policies could have undesired effects on Japan's external identity, "confirming" and reinforcing Japan negative representation as "militarist power." In so far as those policymakers consequently choose to avoid such policies, Chinese and South Korean protests also become a means of influencing Japan's foreign policy. Apart from the external dimension of Japan's identity, we only need to recall the issue of Japanese history textbooks revision to see that the external actors can and do actively participate in Japan's internal identity debates.

Both the internal and external dimensions of state identity necessarily include multiple, often contradictory representations of state and beliefs about its appropriate behavior. Although it is often possible to distinguish dominant representations, the proposed conceptualization of identity also includes the non-dominant yet influential representations. Such non-dominant representations are used to mobilize political support or opposition in the process of state identity politics, and could in time replace the currently dominant representations. They are therefore crucially important to the analysis of change of foreign policy and state identity. Even in the "isolationist" United States before the Second World War the non-dominant internationalist representation of US could attract certain support, in particular among the elite. After the Pearl Harbor, it became the dominant representation, yet the isolationist representation has not completely lost its appeal after US shift to internationalism. Both of these contradictory representations have been quite important for the foreign policy debate within US, and should be included in the analysis of American state identity politics.

The proposed approach is essentially different from culturalist and relativist perspectives that dwell upon the uniqueness of different states' political cultures and diplomatic styles. Like cultures, state identities could indeed include a number of idiosyncratic elements, whose analysis will not greatly enhance our understanding of international relations proper⁷. State identity approaches therefore must go beyond analyzing the *content* of state identity when attempting to explain state interests and behavior. In order to advance our understanding of international relations, state identity approaches should offer theoretical findings that are either generalizable or relevant to the international system as a whole. This is why this paper seeks to shift analytical focus from the content of state identity to state identity politics, and those elements of state identity that reflect complex power relationships within and among states. Since state identity politics constitute a field where the division of labor, rights and responsibilities of states in the international system is contested and negotiated, it can be conceived as one of the mechanisms of inter-

national governance.

Like much of the mainstream of international relations theory, the proposed approach considers *power* as its central concept. Yet the conceptualization of power offered here is different from that of neorealist mainstream, which advances too restrictive a definition of power in terms of material and military capabilities. While military power is in some cases a superior means of coercion, the rule through coercion only is too costly and insecure because of the resentment and resistance it provokes. In international system as well as in domestic politics, successful rule usually requires an element of authority. American hegemony and the “international order” that it helps to produce function through the broad (though never universal) recognition of the state representations that define acceptable or appropriate behavior for different states, while awarding certain actors (states and international institutions) the authority to act as guardians of international peace and order. This paper is particularly interested in the aspect of power that enables actors to impose and reproduce certain intersubjective interpretations of reality, which necessarily include state representations. It is not necessarily a “totalitarian” power, as it is not under total control of the ruling elites in the states that enjoy military and economic superiority. It is more diffused than material power, endowing certain actors, for example NGOs and mass media, with a much higher degree of influence than what their material capabilities alone would permit.

7. State identity and the mainstream rationalist approaches

If we start from the assumption of state as a rational self-interested actor, shouldn't we dispense with the concept of state identity altogether? If one views identity as states' self-understanding, it might be indeed difficult to reconcile this notion with rationalist commitments. However, judging from the possibility of the debate and conflict over national identity, we can safely assume the existence the minorities within states that do not share current self-understandings. Since these minorities could sometimes include people at the top of the state's decision-making structures, the notion of state's self-understanding is clearly too inclusive and ambitious. Given that the word “state” is conventionally used as a short-cut to mean “government” or “state leadership,” the constructivist view of public opinion as a major component of states' self-understanding can also be quite confusing. What is a state's self-understanding on those occasions when its government's foreign policy posture and public opinion diverge? The proposed reconceptualization of state identity that replaces “state self-understanding” with a less ambitious notion of “state representation” can remove this source of confusion and ambiguity. While fully acceptable to the constructivist camp, the new definition of state identity is not completely incompatible with the mainstream assumption of states as rational, self-interested actors. This is because the definition of state identity in terms of state representations does not rule out the rationality of those people who act in the name of state. While “self-understanding” presupposes belief, the proposed definition of state identity is agnostic as to why different actors seek to impose particular representations of state. They might do it in order to advance their self-interest, or because they believe those representations, or both. They might even do it because they actively seek power - a possibility that the conventional constructivist state identity approaches that focus on the link between identity and interests have tended to neglect.

The mainstream of international relations, and the realist approaches in particular simply cannot afford to ignore identity. The examples provided below should illustrate that the most important explanatory concept of realism, power, is intrinsically linked to state identities. The examples are not meant to exhaust all the aspects of the complex relations between state identity and power. They are

rather suggestive of the possible directions for empirical research that could benefit from the reconceptualization of state identity offered in this paper. The author believes that power materialism is the only theoretical commitment that is fully incompatible with the concept of state identity. Yet the full account of state identity politics, particularly in respect to its internal dimension, would also require a relaxation of unitary state assumption⁸.

Example 1. State identity as a tool in the strategic interaction

A possibility of purely instrumental uses of identity by unitary and rational states (governments) can be inferred from Thomas Schelling's argument that "it is not a universal advantage in situations of conflict to be inalienably and manifestly rational in decision and motivation... It may be perfectly rational [...] to wish for the power to suspend certain rational capabilities in particular situations" (1960, 18). Being rational translates into being predictable, which is often a crucial disadvantage in the strategic interaction. It enables adversaries to anticipate rational actor's actions and responses, to gain the initiative and to structure the context of interaction to their advantage. A rational actor risks becoming a prisoner to own rationality, playing a losing game with those who can at will walk out of that prison.

Those actors who wish to "suspend" their rationality can use state identity as a strategic tool for shaping others' expectation about oneself. State identity can thus be an instrument to convince others that one is *not* rational over certain issues. It works by enhancing the credibility of commitments and threats, especially in situations when such commitments and threats seem to defy expectations based on the assumption of actor's rationality. Such situations include, for example, trying to deter (or compel) the opponent by making a threat of mutually painful reprisal (Schelling, 1960, 19), as in the classical case of nuclear deterrence where the adversary is threatened with massive retaliation. Conveniently, state identity can be used to resist threats and blackmail, as well as to make a self-binding commitment to a particular bargaining position. Schelling notes that "when national representatives go to international negotiations knowing that there is a wide range of potential agreement within which the outcome will depend on bargaining, they seem often to create a bargaining position by public statements, statements calculated to arouse a public opinion that permits no concessions to be made" (1960, 28).

Incorporating this kind of "instrumental" identity into rationalist theoretical framework would not require significant alterations to the key assumptions of rational actor model, as state identity is simply utilized by rational policymakers. Yet to be an effective tool identity needs to be more than just a tool. The strategic value of identity lies in the very fact that it is partly outside of the government's control. For a rational government, having the perfect control over the internal dimension of state identity is a disadvantage in strategic interaction. Once the fact of such control becomes obvious to other actors (adversaries), they can disregard any reference to the "controlled" identity. Being partly outside of the "rational" control, identity acquires a certain dynamic of its own. A strategic tool can thus become an unwanted constraint on government's policy options.

Example 2. State identity and the issues of accumulation and use of military power.

In the period between the two World Wars the United States already had the superior economic capabilities, yet it failed to accumulate enough military power or to use the power in its disposal in order to defend its interests and deter adversaries in Europe and Asia. Today the situation is reversed - US

spends much more on the development of its military capabilities (both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the GDP) than most European countries as well as Japan. Most observers would attribute this to US shift from isolationism to internationalism, a shift that is theoretically insignificant for the materialist analytical frameworks, yet readily recognizable by state identity approaches. To the extent that state identity politics affects individual countries' decisions about the amount of spending on the development of military capabilities, it becomes one of the factors that shape the worldwide distribution of capabilities⁹. State identity politics also influences the decisions on whether it is appropriate to use military force in a given situation. Since the end of the Second World War, Japan and Germany have been much more reluctant to employ military force in their international relations than many other states. As Berger (1998) and Katzenstein (1996) have argued, this fact is difficult to explain within mainstream analytical frameworks, that is without reference to the identities of these two countries.

Example 3. Power through the recognition of state identity

There is certainly no doubt that as far as the political and especially military dimension of power is concerned, we are living in the unipolar world of US hegemony. Yet a simple conclusion that US gets what it wants because it is more powerful than other states tells us very little about how US power actually functions in the interstate system. US military capabilities do not get magically transformed into the control over outcomes. Furthermore, even though US might be powerful enough to get whatever it wants, there is still an issue of cost. US state representation as the "leader of the West" with corresponding rights and responsibilities is one of the reasons why American public opinion accepts costly military interventions abroad and the active military posture in general. History demonstrates that without such a domestic support, US government might be either unable or unwilling to provide leadership despite its superior material capabilities. Yet US would not be able to maintain this particular representation if other members of the West resented and opposed US leadership. Realist analyses that concentrate on material capabilities cannot make a distinction between hegemony through recognition and consent, and hegemony by military preponderance alone. The difference is in identities, in how other states view the hegemon - as a recognized "world policeman" or purely self-interested power-hungry adversary. Both kinds of hegemony must be backed by superior military capabilities, yet the way hegemon's power functions in the interstate system, as well as the cost of maintaining the hegemony, would be quite different. Of course, the hegemonies in the real world are located somewhere between these two poles, and can in time move along the dimension between rule by consent and rule by power.

Taking the example of the recent war in Iraq, the European opposition to US intervention should not make us overlook the long history of European support for US. We must also remember that European opposition was mostly diplomatic and verbal, not the kind of power "balancing" that realist theories hail as the unchanging law of interstate relations. Other states, like Russia, might have enough military power to conduct a successful military intervention in Iraq. Yet unlike the United States, which are widely, if often grudgingly, recognized as the "world policeman," Russia's claims to such an identity (and the attendant responsibility to combat threats to international peace and order) would not be recognized by vast majority of states. Russian imperial past, domestic political organization and host of other factors not only make Russia's recognition as a "world policeman" very unlikely, but also mean that its military interventions would probably be regarded simply as an aggression or conquest. American external identity is therefore an important, though immaterial, power resource, which depends on the recogni-

tion by and constant renegotiation with other states as it is not under full control of US administration.

8. Applicability of state identity concept

Hopf (1998, 198) considers it to be an advantage rather than a problem of state identity approaches that they place “extraordinary demands on the researcher to gather mountains of elaborate empirical data”, including “thousands of pages of reading, months of interviews and archival research” (one could add mastery of a foreign language to this list). Yet there is an important aspect to this problem that Hopf fails to acknowledge. As compared to the mainstream approaches, constructivist accounts of identity politics in a particular state have excessive “initiation requirements” that do in fact inhibit debate and healthy criticism. Since such accounts necessarily involve selection of data from those “thousands of pages of reading, months of interviews and archival research,” the chances are the researcher would find what (s)he (or his/her approach) wants to find. If the amount of raw data to be analyzed and other initiation requirements are sufficient to deter other scholars, the resulting selection bias is quite likely to go unchecked. Given the continuing debate among rival paradigms and theories together with an ambition to develop *theories* of international relations, the discipline has historically privileged theory-building and analytical skills over area-specific knowledge and foreign language proficiency. Thus in today’s disciplinary context, constructivist accounts of identity politics in a particular state do not receive the adequate scrutiny by fellow researchers, whether of mainstream or constructivist orientation. The point here is that there are not only theoretical, but also disciplinary limits to the applicability of state identity approaches. Thus a collective and pluralist exploration of state identity politics in/among the United States and a handful of other important states is, at least for the time being, preferable to the “horizontal expansion” of identity approaches.

9. Conclusion

The paper clarified the relationship between state identity and other important concepts of constructivist approaches, and provided a systematic review of directions of research pursued by different constructivist approaches. The paper showed that state identity is constructivism’s central concept, which serves as the theoretical foundation for the constructivist argument about norms. The paper also identified the problems and clarified some ambiguities inherent in constructivist theorizing about state identity. These include the underspecified relationship between state identity and other important concepts of constructivism, the problem of choice among multiple identities, and the rarely addressed issue of applicability of the concept of state identity. Finally, the paper made an attempt to reconceptualize the concept of state identity and facilitate its acceptance by largely rationalist mainstream of the international relations discipline. The participation of mainstream scholars, who have until now largely ignored the concept, would surely lead to a more productive debate on the role that state identities play in international relations.

Notes

- (1) Recent proliferation of constructivist approaches has left *constructivism* as no more than a label that applies to a great (and increasing) number of very diverse theoretical frameworks. Therefore it is nearly impossible to pro-

vide a coherent summary of the theoretical commitments and conceptual apparatus of constructivism within the limited space of this article. An article by Ted Hopf (1998) provides a good overview of different constructivist approaches; for a more theoretical discussion of constructivism see Guzzini (2000). Most constructivist approaches are developed in opposition to neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism (or neoliberalism), which represent the mainstream of the largely US-dominated international relations discipline. Both neorealism and neoliberalism assume that states are unitary, rational utility-maximizing actors. Their only area of disagreement is about the nature of the utility that states seek to maximize. Neorealists argue that states pursue security through power, while neoliberals emphasize economic gain. The “bible” of neorealism is *Theory of International Politics* by Waltz (1979); for a systematic presentation of neoliberal argument, see Keohane (1984). Both neorealism and neoliberalism are based on rational choice theory, which is why this paper refers to them as “rationalist” approaches. A slightly more inclusive view of the mainstream would also include a number of approaches that share a commitment to methodological rationalism, yet relax the unitary state assumption. A survey of such approaches could be found in Milner (1998).

- (2) With few exceptions, empirical studies that rely on the concept of state identity are concerned with the foreign policy of United States (Campbell (1992), Ruggie (1997), Bukovansky (1997), Hemmer et al., (2002)), as well as Japan and Germany (Berger (1996; 1998), Katzenstein (1996), Banchoff (1999)).
- (3) With the exception of those cases when the concept of national identity is used to refer to what is essentially a state identity, the review of *national* identity literature is beyond the scope of this paper. Yet this should not imply the denial of the link between national and state identities, which will be explicitly discussed in the paper.
- (4) Some scholars who tried to evaluate the constructivist contribution to international relations theory have also awarded special treatment to the concept of identity. Zehfuss (2001) sees identity as both a central concept of and a threat to constructivism. Hopf (1998), in a footnote to his broad and inclusive review of various constructivist approaches, explains that he chose to focus on identities since they are “the most proximate causes of choices, preferences, and action”, and that the full understanding of identity is impossible without a simultaneous account of norms, culture and institutions (1998, 174). Hopf himself, however, does not offer any such account.
- (5) For a related argument see Price et al. (1996).
- (6) This paper follows Hopf’s (1998) distinction between “conventional” and “critical” constructivism. This paper omits the word “conventional” when referring to the former, yet retains the word “critical” in respect to the latter. Critical constructivism is based on the postmodern epistemology of critical theory, and is largely ignored by the mainstream of the international relations discipline. This paper’s discussion of critical constructivist position on state identity usually refers to works by Campbell (1992) and Zehfuss (2001; 2002). See also Hopf (1998).
- (7) It can be argued that even the analyses of idiosyncratic elements of state identity could in some cases enhance our understanding of international relations. Such cases include the study of state identity of the states that play important roles in the functioning of international system, with the accounts of the American, Japanese and German identities as primary examples.
- (8) The unitary state assumption shared by neorealism and neoliberalism is highly controversial and certainly does not reflect the disciplinary consensus. Helen Milner’s (1998) survey of rationalist scholarship views the relaxation of unitary state assumption as an actual direction of the rationalist mainstream’s evolution.
- (9) Incidentally, the distribution of capabilities among states is the most important independent variable of the mainstream neorealist approach.

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